

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 2, 2025

STATE OF COLORADO)
COUNTY OF OTERO) SS
CITY OF LA JUNTA)

CALL TO ORDER: The regular meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Monday, September 2, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

INVOCATION: Mayor Ayala gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Mayor Ayala led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: The following Council Members were present:

Damon Ramirez, Ward 1
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Subject to approval at the
September 15, 2025
City Council Meeting

Absent: none

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Pam Denahy, Director of Tourism/Econ. Dev.
Dawn Block, Director of Human Resources
Aliza Libby, Director of Finance
Julie Sumpter, National WIFE
Douglas Golding, La Junta
Josh Harris, La Junta
Traci Stoffel, Colorado DOLA
Matt Gordon, Colorado DOLA
Stacey Ayala, La Junta
Zeke Ayala, La Junta
Jeremiah Stoker, La Junta
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person):

1. Douglas Golding, 1316 Lincoln Avenue: Recently attended the Tourism Board meeting a couple weeks ago. My vehicle was parked out front of the entry to this building and somebody sideswiped the whole side. I made a report to the Police Department and when the investigator got back to me, he said there's no cameras pointing this way. There's no camera's telling you who comes in and out of this building. I'm surprised you don't want to know. Also, disappointed to see a vacant council seat and am sorry there isn't some kind of time allowance for someone that has to change residence.
2. Traci Stoffel and Matthew Gordon, DOLA, representing Main Street: We are here for our annual visit and will be touring the downtown to see how we can help. We are just here to support your community and make your downtown what you envision it to be.
3. Jeremiah Stoker, 511 Grant Avenue: Yes, my seat was vacated after I submitted a petition to run for a new ward even though it's common practice in state and federal elections for people to run for other districts. For an example, Lauren Boebert running for congressional district 4 while she was

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still representing and resident in congressional district 3. But that's a moot point. One of the things I do want to bring up that I'm a little disappointed we don't have an agenda item for filling that vacancy. Like I had said on Thursday, there's a reminder that it is thirty days to fill a seat. So, the fact that we haven't started already because the council already violated the Charter once with a vacancy. That seat was vacated in July and never filled. It was filled by election in November which is beyond thirty days. So again, I don't want that same circumstance to happen. Just kind of want to know when you plan on filling it. But the main reason I came up here today and I plan on attending the Urban Renewal meeting at the end of the month but this one is a little bit sooner. It has to do with last Thursday's Urban Renewal meeting. They approved to spend over \$5,000 including vinyl window coverings on what was the old Sears Building. My issue with this one, for one, there's no application. So, this was a project sought out by Urban Renewal and Urban Renewal policy pertains to blight, which blight can be referred in the state statute. Remediation of blight and safety or public health issues., to stimulate the economic vitality and business development. These funds can be used for code improvement which includes your electrical, plumbing, all your fire issues, sprinklers, fire alarms, fire escapes, additional egress and ingress points. As well as unsafe exterior and interior improvements. And again, this is all part of Urban Renewal policy. Increased commercial tenancy and it's a necessity to benefit buildings in the public. This fund, through application is a reimbursement after an owner paid. Which my understanding there's no application or no plans for the owner to front this. This is all Urban Renewal. Going on to the window covering, in particular, there is a section that says funding may not be used for finishes such as paint, flooring, furniture, blinds, lighting fixtures, or anything that would not qualify for blight or life safety. Now, the question I ask is those windows that are being covered, they're all intact. No cracks or breaks in any of them. So, what I want to know is if we do that for one building, if the other businesses see that go up and decide to put in an application to Urban Renewal for the same things. Those applications by rules should be denied. So, we're kind of setting a precedence here of hey this doesn't apply here but when Urban Renewal's own policy does state that those things wouldn't qualify and as long as the windows are intact, I don't see a reason for it to be blight or safety. I just wanted the council to consider that and maybe get in touch with Urban Renewal prior to the meeting. Urban Renewal is funded by the 1% TIF and so it should also be the council's due diligence to make sure that those funds are administered properly and to the correct items.

REPORTS**A. Tourism and Economic Development (Pam Denahy).**

- Tarantula Fest will be September 26-27, 2025. Tours are sold out as of August 31st but are still accepting merchant and food vendors along with parade registrations.
- The Visit La Junta website is being redesigned. It will have a similar look but updates will be made to the back-end for easier use.
- Working in close partnership with Bent's Old Fort. The Fort is now allowing plaza access on Thursdays through Mondays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- Will be receiving a Tarantula Trek proclamation from the State of Colorado.
- Pam was nominated and selected as a finalist for the Governor's Award for Outstanding Colorado Tourism Champion.
- Pam is also part of the Doers & Makers Boettcher Fellowship. Her first retreat will be this weekend.
- The Economic Development Summit created three top priorities for La Junta. 1) Beautify store fronts in downtown La Junta. 2) Identify new primary industry(s) to recruit to La Junta Industrial Park by 2030. 3) Reassess and upgrade all aging City Infrastructure.
- La Junta Creative Main Street is in a joint program with Colorado Creative Industries and DOLA (who is here for our annual visit). Goals are: activate downtown, build lasting partnerships and spruce up La Junta.
- We are in Phase 3 (in partnership with CSU extension) of the Rural Technical Assistance Program. Goals are: revitalize downtown and expand economic opportunities, strengthen collaboration, community engagement, volunteerism & partnership, destination marketing and promotion of outdoor and cultural assets.
- Michael, Martin and Pam are working together on the second half of the Brownfields grant.

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- **Main Street/Urban Renewal Project:** Out of the Economic Development Summit three priorities were identified. The beautify storefronts in downtown La Junta was one that came up as high priority. Urban Renewal and Main Street was a good fit. Both focus on economic vitality. These conversations came after a presentation that Martin Montoya gave to Urban Renewal concerning the vacant buildings that were downtown. This led to the discussion of how do we make it look better, beautifying it to help with the economic vitality of our community. The buildings were selected using the vacant building list within downtown. We had two joint work sessions to come up with the idea of the vinyl windows. It was approved by Urban Renewal from a funding standpoint to start this project. Main Street is hoping to be able to get grant funding to move forward. But we were really hoping to get this first one done by Tarantula Fest. We have a lot of tourists in town during that weekend.

CONSENT AGENDA**A. Regular Meeting Minutes August 18, 2025.**

MOTION TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 2, 2025 CONSENT AGENDA: Ramirez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Ward 2 Vacancy)

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Present 2026 Budget.** Finance Director Aliza Libby delivered the 2026 budget. A public budget hearing will be scheduled in the future.

- B. City of La Junta Drug & Alcohol Policy (Dawn Block).** In April of this year, we had a site visit by CDOT who administers our 5311 grant, which is a pass-through grant from the FTA (Federal Transit Administration). They said that we need to update our drug and alcohol testing policy. So, we followed their template. In order for us to continue to receive federal funding, we have to do this. FTA rules say that the governing body has to adopt or approve this policy. The other two policies we have is the federal motor carrier's policy which governs all of our DOT employees which are the CDL drivers. Then, we also have a non-DOT policy which governs your clerical and administration. These three policies mirror each other. The major change is we are proposing this to be a zero-tolerance policy. (Discussion continued regarding drug free workplace versus zero tolerance, provisions for searching employee vehicles, dispensation, marijuana use, who and where is the testing done.)

MOTION TO ADOPT THE NEW CITY OF LA JUNTA DRUG & ALCOHOL POLICY: Velasquez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no further discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 5-0 (Ward 2 Vacancy, Pantoya absent)

C. Tourism Board Recommendation for Funding

- 1. National WIFE (Women Involved in Farm Economics) Convention, October 23-25 in La Junta at Otero College - \$5,000 sponsorship request.** This is their 49th annual convention. It is a 3-day convention that will bring in between 100 – 125 people from outside of La Junta. Their goals for life are to educate, support and advocate.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE EXPENDITURE OF TOURISM TAX REVENUE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$5,000 TO THE NATIONAL WIFE (WOMEN INVOLVED IN FARM ECONOMICS) CONVENTION ON OCTOBER 23-25: Rikhof

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Ward 2 Vacancy)

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1. There were no committee/board reports.

E. City Manager's Comments

- CML District meeting is coming up on the 25th this month in Las Animas.
- The water tie-in on 14th Street is about to wrap up.
- New fire hydrants have been installed on Park and Raton Avenue.
- The sludge press is complete and we're waiting on the building. It is about 6-8 weeks out.
- Flu shots for employees are available in September.
- Martin and the crew will be fixing the curb on the north side on 10th Street between Barnes and Maple Avenue. They will also be doing a stormwater inlet as well.
- City Clean-Up in October. A list of do's and don'ts is getting put together.
- Fire Prevention week is also in October.
- Early Settler's Day is this weekend.
- Brock and I are still putting together the Property Management bus tour for council.

F. Community Events/Council Reports

1. Council Member Velasquez:
 - The Tour de Santa Fe Trail will be Saturday, September 27th. Check-in is at 6:00 a.m. and the ride starts at 8:00 a.m. It's a 50-mile bike ride from La Junta to Las Animas and back. Registration fee is \$75.00. All proceeds go to the Arkansas Valley Medical Regional Center to help fund essential health care programs, medical equipment, community health initiative that directly benefit the Arkansas Valley region.
2. Council Member Pantoya:
 - Early Settler's Day is Saturday, September 6th. "Better Together" is the theme. There will be a 3-on-3 basketball tournament beginning at 8:00 a.m. followed by the community breakfast and 9:00 a.m. and the parade starting at 10:00 a.m.

G. Governing Body Reports

1. Mayor Ayala:
 - Paul will have a letter to email out after we get further clarification from the hospital. After meeting with Ron Hogue, we will be getting monthly information.
 - I also got and updated audit that I will send out to you guys.
2. Council Member Rikhof:
 - Question about the vacancy that we have. It doesn't seem like there's much direction in the code for how to fill a vacancy other than the city council can vote on a vacancy and I'm assuming then we make nominations.

Mayor Ayala: The vacancy will be opened tomorrow until the 11th for anybody that's interested. The letters of interest will be included in the 15th packet for us to make nominations at that meeting. That still puts us within the thirty days. We do have an open spot on the Utility Board but it doesn't say thirty days on that one in the Charter.

Council Member Pantoya: When they put their letter of intent in, they would just serve until the election?

Mayor Ayala: Yes. We would do that at the front of the meeting. They would have the rest of that meeting, October 6th, 20th and the first meeting in November before the election.

Council Member Rikhof: So, in the past with Elaine's resignation, we got zero interest?

Mayor Ayala: I don't have the greatest memory. We did have a different City Attorney at that point. They would have worked with Mel.

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Council Member Rikhof: I suggest that we put some other things in writing. This seems like something that should be in writing. It's very ambiguous and I think we're doing something totally different than was done last time.

City Attorney Harris: I think that's done when we talk about the resolution. We could certainly entertain anything that anyone wants to suggest and I can draft one. We used a draft resolution that was at least circulated to Mel and to our mayor when we were preparing for the Thursday meeting. We didn't really discuss how we would memorialize what happened on Thursday. My assumption though is that we would circulate a resolution for the next packet. If there are other things that you would like to offer, send them to Joe and we will try to understand what the discussion might look like and what the resolution might need if we're going to expand the discussion to further issues regarding filling the vacancy. Whatever we decide, we should be thorough and specific about what it is that we've done because it is true that I have no idea what happened with the Elaine vacancy. There's nothing that was made of record so that we could follow it.

3. Council Member Rikhof:

- Question about planning ahead for meetings with the budget hearing for the public. It is in the code that there needs to be at least a ten-day notice and I think it has to be done by October 15th. So, there's not a whole lot of dates that would work between now and then and I think that we can do a better job of announcing. We meet twice a month. I think it's reasonable. If we're doing something that's important like putting out the city council vacancy, or we're having a proposed budget hearing, that we put it out in a council meeting that it's happening in the future instead of things being posted without them being discussed at council meetings. I think it improves our ability to be transparent if we talk about them in council meetings.

Council Member Pantoya: I think they have been in the past when we've had openings. Just like you did now with the Utility Board. It's not something that we don't bring up.

Mayor Ayala: We will put some dates together with a doodle poll and see what works for the budget hearing.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor